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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0201
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0095
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0181
RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN PRIORITY 0353
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0329
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0385
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GABORONE 001082

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S
LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [BC](#)
SUBJECT: BOTSWANA-ZIMBABWE TENSIONS REMAIN HIGH

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Philip R Drouin;
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: During a series of meetings on December 9, contacts in Botswana's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed to A/DCM that a ministerial level meeting of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence, and Security troika will be held in Gaborone December 11. The purpose of this meeting is for the Organ troika representatives to hear Botswana's response to allegations which had been presented by Zimbabwe at the body's November 5 meeting in Maputo. Zimbabwe has alleged that Botswana is actively working to undermine the GOZ, including by providing "military training" to MDC supporters. The GOB has loudly and publicly dismissed these claims as baseless, but is nevertheless scrambling to mount a strong case for the Organ meeting. Ministry officials are frustrated not only by the continuing political and humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe but also by regional criticism of Botswana for speaking its mind on Zimbabwe. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) A/DCM Heather Merritt had a series of meetings with officials in Botswana's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on December 9. Both Assistant Director for the Americas Shimane Kelaotswe and Assistant Director in the Africa Division Mr. Mosole told A/DCM that they had spent the entire previous weekend working on a special committee preparing for the December 11 meeting of the SADC Organ troika to be held in Gaborone, at which the troika will listen to Botswana's "defense" against the charges which were presented by Zimbabwe at a November 5 meeting in Maputo. Zimbabwe has alleged that Botswana is trying to undermine the GOZ, including by providing military training to members of the opposition MDC. Mr. Mosole said that the meeting was supposed to be at the Ministerial level, and confirmed that Foreign Minister Skelemani would be presenting Botswana's response. However, he noted that exact participation on the Zimbabwean side had not yet been confirmed. Mosole said that the GOB had asked the SADC Secretariat to urge Zimbabwe to send its Foreign Minister to the meeting, but he feared that no high-level GOZ representative would attend.

13. (C) According to Mosole, the Zimbabwean "evidence" of Botswana's wrongdoing which has been presented to SADC includes items like a videotape of Foreign Minister Skelemani publicly criticizing the Mugabe regime on the BBC's "Hardtalk" show and tapes of the Voice of America's "Studio

7" program. (Note: There is a large IBB transmission station in Selebi-Phikwe, Botswana, which allows Zimbabweans short wave and medium wave access to VOA programming, including the Studio 7 show which is broadcast in English/Shona/Ndebele and covers Zimbabwe news and information.) Mr. Kelaotswe told A/DCM that the charges being leveled against Botswana were "nonsense" and he claimed that the Zimbabwean High Commission staff in Gaborone had even complained to Harare that they had no evidence to back the GOZ's claims about MDC members receiving military training inside Botswana. Both Mosole and Kelaotswe claim that the GOZ's only "evidence" of military training in Botswana comes from "eyewitness testimony" offered by prisoners being held in Zimbabwe. Kelaotswe says that the GOB is not aware of any connection between these alleged witnesses and the Botswana Defence Forces. Kelaotswe also noted that some newspapers within SADC countries (notably the "New Era" in Windhoek with its pro-GON and pro-SWAPO leanings) have been critical of Botswana and seem to give credence to the GOZ's allegations. However, he dismissed the negative regional press coverage, saying that it was not reflective of regional public opinion and reality, and came from government propaganda mouthpieces with a nostalgic slant for the liberation struggle rather than current human suffering.

¶4. (C) Mr. Tinar Lekuni, Deputy Director in the MFA's Africa Division (the second ranking officer in charge of Africa at the Botswana MFA) vented at length about his and the GOB's frustration over the continuing political and humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe. He said that the GOB has been encouraged by the chorus of voices around the world calling for

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political change in Zimbabwe (including African voices like Raila Odinga, Desmond Tutu, and Kofi Annan) but he worried about what next steps Botswana and like-minded nations could take to break the current impasse. He complained that privately many African governments agree that Mugabe should go, but they are unwilling to say so publicly or take any steps to encourage change. Mr. Lekuni confirmed that Morgan Tsvangirai was staying in Gaborone (from where he called in to CNN International to give an interview on December 10). A/DCM noted that there was some criticism in Harare of Tsvangirai's extended absence from Zimbabwe, but Lekuni responded that the GOB believes there are real threats to the MDC leader's safety should he return home, and said Tsvangirai would be allowed to stay in Botswana as needed. Mr. Lekuni also noted that he was concerned about the recent re-emergence of ZAPU as a political force in Zimbabwe. He feared that President Mugabe had secretly encouraged the ZAPU veterans to break away from ZANU-PF, as ZAPU still has many supporters (especially in Matabeleland) and this would further splinter the opposition vote should a re-run election be held. Mr. Lekuni and A/DCM also discussed what effect the Zimbabwe crisis may have on the 2010 World Cup, and whether any behind the scenes pressure could be brought to bear on soccer's international governing body FIFA or on the government of South Africa on the grounds that Zimbabwean health and security problems could prevent RSA from successfully staging the world's premier soccer tournament. When FIFA talks, the SAG (usually) listens.

¶5. (C) Mr. Lekuni recently returned from an assignment in Geneva, and he complained that he was constantly urged by the Africa Group in Geneva to "follow the African consensus" and take no action on human rights matters. He noted that this kind of mentality which values solidarity over opposing wrongs leads Africa to situations like Zimbabwe. A/DCM noted that Botswana had recently voted with the U.S. on three significant human rights matters in UN 3rd Committee, and these votes were a change from previous years for which we were grateful. Lekuni was aware of and happy about Botswana's UN votes and attributed the change to the willingness of the Khama administration to stand on principle rather than merely follow common regional positions.

¶16. (C) COMMENT: Foreign Minister Skelemani has invited our Charge and a small group of like-minded Heads of Mission here to meet December 12 to discuss Zimbabwe and Burundi (whose President was invited to Botswana by Khama this week). We should get a read-out of the SADC proceedings at that time and will report the outcome via septel. There is no doubt that Botswana feels beleaguered for its advocacy of political change in neighboring Zimbabwe. At a time when millions of Zimbabweans are hungry and thousands infected with cholera, a somnolent SADC is wasting time investigating fictional accounts of military training camps inside Botswana. This distraction in the face of real and urgent problems more than anything seems to frustrate both the government and people of Botswana. However, the GOB is confident that since it has done nothing wrong (and in fact last week offered to send US \$300,000 to relief agencies to help in Zimbabwe) the allegations will soon pass. However, the GOB remains frustrated that SADC (and especially South Africa) is still unwilling or unable to broker political change in Zimbabwe. Any other tangible support or ideas on Zimbabwe that the USG might be able to provide now, to bolster Botswana's beleaguered and principled diplomacy while supplementing our frequent kudos to the GOB, would also be useful and appreciated. END COMMENT.

DROUIN